

TRANSIT SUBSIDY BENEFIT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Who is eligible to receive the transit benefit?

The transit subsidy is for all Federal employees, whether part-time, or temporary as long as the Federal government is paying them. However volunteers are not permitted to participate, nor are temporary employees who are assigned from private temporary services.

2. How do I apply for the transit benefit?

Complete Form AD 1147. Prior to completing this form you must make sure you meet the eligibility requirements.

3. What are the eligibility requirements for transit subsidy?

Participants must be USDA employees who use qualified transit facilities (subway, train, bus, ferry, or etc.) on a regular and recurring basis, and who do not receive a free Federal parking benefit (vanpools are exempted from the free Federal parking).

4. What authority allows transit subsidy to be provided to eligible employees within Department of Agriculture?

Public Law 102-486, Section 1911, Treatment of Employer Provided transportation Benefits, effective December 31, 1992. Public Law 103-172, Federal employees Clean Air Incentives Act, effective January 1, 1994. Internal Revenue Service Notice 94-3 dated 1994, Qualified Transportation Fringes Under Code 26 USC, Section 132(f). Public law 105-178, Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century, dated June 9, 1998. Executive order 13150 dated April 21, 2000. 26 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 1, Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefits.

5. Who administers the transit subsidy program?

The Department of Transportation (DOT).

6. Who should I contact when I have a question about the transit subsidy program?

Your mission area/agency/staff office transit subsidy coordinator. List can be obtained on website <http://www.usda.gov/da/employ/ffwg.htm> under Transit Subsidy Coordinators.

7. Do I receive the monthly maximum of \$100.00 a month even though my actual monthly commute amount remains \$60.00?

No, the law states you will receive the maximum amount of \$100.00 or the actual commute cost, whichever is less. So, your amount would remain \$60.00 per month. For example: Mary Smith's monthly commuting cost is \$110 (so Mary would receive the maximum benefit of \$100 per month).

Mary would receive \$300 quarterly. Bob Dulles' monthly commuting cost is \$50. Bob would receive \$150 quarterly.

8. When does the transit subsidy become effective?

Commuter transit subsidy benefits become effective on the date of the employee's signed application. However, in the NCR (National Capital Region) NCR if the application is received by DOT after the 15th in any month, actual distribution of the fare media will not be until the next month's distribution. Field applications received by DOT after the 5th of any month will not receive benefits until the following month.

9. Are carpoolers eligible to receive transit benefits?

No

Can employees apply for this program at any time?

Yes, the program is open continuously for new, changed, or cancelled applications.

11. What is fare media?

Fare media is the type of ticket or pass you will receive to be used for monthly transit expenses.

12. When computing my monthly cost how many working days should I use and can I include other expenses?

You should use the exact number of days you actually use mass public transportation or commuter highway vehicle (vanpool). Do NOT include parking fees, gasoline costs, mileage, or etc. on the AD-1147.

13. How, when, and where will fare media be distributed to employees?

In the NCR fare media is distributed quarterly and the distribution schedule is available on the following website: www.usda.gov/oo/subsidyschedule.htm. In the field distribution can occur monthly or quarterly based on arrangements made with local mass transit companies and it is done by the procedures set by the local coordinator.

14. When do I have to fill out a new form?

If you have a change of name, address, or monthly commuting cost you should fill out a new form. If you are leaving the Agency, you should fill out the form and check the space for cancellation. You should return any Metrocheks or Vouchers you have in your possession with your application. Attach them to the form with a paperclip, not a staple, and submit them to the transit coordinator. It is best if they are returned in person and not through the mail system. If you are new to the Agency, but have been in a Federal transit subsidy program before coming here, you must still fill out a new transit application, and check the space for new employee.

15. In the NCR, if I am not at work during the quarterly distribution and I miss it, what can I do about it?

After the quarterly distribution has taken place, you can go to the DOT on the Plaza level and pick up your subsidy at their TASC office. Take the subway to L'Enfant Plaza. Exit at the 7th & D Street, S.W exit (DOT exit). Go up the escalator to the Plaza Level. Veer slightly to the right and straight ahead, and go through the glass doors that say Southwest Entrance. The guard will direct you to the TASC office on the entry level. Show the clerk your USDA badge and provide the last 4 digits of your social security number and you will receive the subsidy. Additionally, the Department holds monthly make-up sessions in the rear of the South Building cafeteria.

16. Can another individual pick-up my fare media for me?

No, you must pick-up your own fare media.

17. Do I need to present any identification to pick-up my fare media?

Yes, you need either your Government ID or a driver's license.

18. Can I be reimbursed for prior months when I am unable to pick-up my fare media during a particular month?

No, for example: Distribution for April, May and June was accomplished in March. You wait until May to pick-up your fare media. You will not receive fare media for April. You will only receive for May and June.

19. What can I do if I am disabled and have some difficulty picking up my subsidy?

USDA has made arrangements with the TARGET Center on the first floor South Building to have your subsidy picked up and distributed directly to you. You just need to contact them at 202-720-0600, identify that you are a disabled user, and follow through on their instructions for obtaining the quarterly subsidy.

20. Am I permitted to transfer my subsidy to other family members, such as my husband or children?

No, transfer of the transit subsidy benefit is not permitted to anyone, whether family member, co-workers, or others. Along the same lines, you may not sell the transit benefit to another person. If you cannot use the subsidy, you should return it to your transit coordinator. If you need to withdraw from the program, you should fill out a form and note that you are canceling. You can always sign up for the program again.

21. I am a disabled employee who rides Metro Access. I need tokens to ride Metro Access; can I get tokens from DOT?

No, actually you obtain your Metrocheks and then take them downtown to Metro Center and get the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) cashier to exchange the Metrocheks for tokens. You can then use the tokens to pay Metro Access.

22. When I leave the Agency what do I do about my transit benefit?

You must cancel your transit application through your program coordinator and they will calculate what you need to return to the agency in unused fare media and it should be turned in at that time.

23. What if I don't have enough fare media to cover what I owe the government in fare media?

You will need to write a check to the U.S. Treasury for the balance of your fare media.

24. What if I get a job in another agency within the Department can I keep my unused transit subsidy?

No, you must cancel your transit application through your program coordinator and they will calculate what you need to return to the agency in unused fare media and it should be turned in at that time. When you get to your new agency the Human Resources staff will be able to get you in contact with their transit coordinator to sign up in your new Agency.

25. How should I return unused fare media?

In person is the best option for returning fare media. If this is not practical use Federal Express so you will have a receipt and be able to track the delivery of your package. Regular mail is irradiated and Metro will not accept irradiated cards, so if you use the regular mail to return fare cards your Agency may hold you financially liable for your returned cards. Remember that until your coordinator receives your fare media you are financially responsible.

26. Will I be held financially responsible for returned fare media that is damaged and cannot be returned to the DOT for a refund to the agency?

This is up to the individual Agency and will depend on the circumstances that caused the damage to the fare media.

27. Can I use my fare media to travel between the USDA buildings during the day?

No, fare media is to be used for traveling from your residence to your place of employment and return.

28. What do I do with my fare media if I transfer within the same Agency but go to the field from the NCR or vice versa?

If you use a form of mass transit at your new location, you must change your transit application through your program coordinator and they will calculate what you need to return to the agency in unused fare media and it should be turned in with the application. You must return fare media

because it is not interchangeable between systems. If you are not going to use mass transit at your new location, then you must cancel your application through your program coordinator and they will calculate what you need to return to the agency in unused fare media.

29. Can I use my fare media on travel from airport to hotel and vice versa?

No.

30. Are fare media replaced if lost or stolen?

No, unless the agency authorizes to pay a second time for the same fare media.

31. Can I put all my fare media I receive for the quarter on my Smart Card, to my vanpool driver, or to VRE at one time?

No, you may only use the fare media for one month at a time. The application you signed when you entered the program stated that, "I certify that in any given month, I will not use the Government provided transit benefit in excess of the statutory limit." By using your fare media at one time you are violating the agreement you signed when you applied for the program.

32. In the NCR standing in line to receive fare media is cumbersome. Can disbursement be done in a less time consuming way?

No, not at this time. DOT and USDA have set the procedure for distribution of fare media. They have worked together to create more distribution points and expand times to reduce wait times and this seems to be working.

33. My spouse drops me at work but I take mass transit home am I eligible to receive a benefit?

No, in order to qualify for the transit subsidy, you must use mass transit on a regular and recurring basis, which means 100% of the time, on a round trip, home to work basis.

34. If a person only uses mass transit during bad weather or occasionally are they eligible for the program?

No.

35. What if I have a change in the way I commute or the cost, what do I need to do if anything?

It is your responsibility to submit an updated application to your program coordinator as soon as possible.

36. What should I do if I commute fewer days in a month than I stated on the form for reasons of vacation, extended sickness, etc.?

You will reduce your next quarterly pick-up amount by the amount you have left. You will be required to inform the DOT agent that you should receive less and tell them the amount. It requires you being honest.

37. Some areas receive a cash reimbursement, who determines who gets cash and who gets fare media?

DOT has entered into agreements with mass transit companies all over the country and anywhere that fare media is not available we are authorized to pay a cash reimbursement to eligible employees. DOT determines who will get cash and who will get fare media.

38. Can fare media be provided more than 3 months in advance?

No, the IRS code only authorizes a 3-month advance of fare media.

39. How do I replace a demagnetized metrochek?

You can ask a metro station attendant for an envelope to mail the tickets back to Metro for replacements; or, you can take them to Metro Center Sales Office.

40. Will DOT replace a demagnetized metrochek for USDA employees?

No, USDA does not have an agreement with DOT to replace demagnetized metrocheks. There would be an additional charge to the organization to replace them.

41. Where can I exchange Metrocheks for the Marc train or other fare media?

Go to the website www.wmata.com and across the top of the screen select "Fares" then click on "Metrocheks" and then click on "Metrochek exchange sites".